

Question: What is the Biblical basis for praying for the lost?

Answer: The Scriptures are very clear that we should pray for the salvation of the lost. Here are some Biblical passages that show intercession for the lost on the basis of either precept or example:

(1) 1 Timothy 2:1-4 clearly exhorts that prayer be made for “all men” (Verse 1) to include “kings” and “all that are in authority” (Verse 2). The basis for this prayer is that it is “good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior” (Verse 3) and that God desires for all men to “be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (Verse 4).

(2) Luke 23:34 – While on the cross Jesus interceded for sinners as He prayed “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” Within a short time after this prayer, we see it answered as one of the thieves that hung beside Jesus received salvation (Luke 23:40-43). Soon after that, we find that a centurion that was standing by acknowledged Jesus’ Deity and glorified God (Luke 23:46-47). Then, on the Day of Pentecost, we find about 3,000 saved (Acts 2:41) and there has been a countless multitude saved since then.

(3) Acts 7:59-60 – Moments before his death, the first recorded post-resurrection martyr (Stephen), interceded for his executors by crying out to God, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge” (Verse 60). Stephen interceded for lost souls.

(4) Romans 10:1 – The Apostle Paul prayed for his lost kinsmen of Israel. In this passage Paul says, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.” Here Paul states very clearly that he was praying for the salvation of these individuals – the same people who were most actively involved in persecuting him and seeking his death.

This example of praying for the lost is one that you will find down through history in men and women who God has greatly used. As you read the biographies of those who God has used mightily, you will find one common denominator was that they each had a broken heart for lost souls and had a passion to see them saved for the glory of God. This passion led them to intercede before God for their salvation – and God worked through their prayers. Prayer does not move the hand of God; however, God uses means and one of the primary means He uses is the prayers of His people. As God’s people are drawn close to Him they will find that the salvation of men is a matter near and dear to His heart and His will (2 Peter 3:9, Luke 19:10). When His people respond by turning to Him and praying in accordance with His will (Matthew 6:10), and in the name of Jesus (John 14:13), then God works for His own glory. A burden for lost souls should be the reaction of every child of God as they consider the eternal state of those who die apart from Christ. A burden for lost souls should be the reaction of every child of God as they esteem the great sacrifice the Lord Jesus Christ has made so that individuals might be saved.